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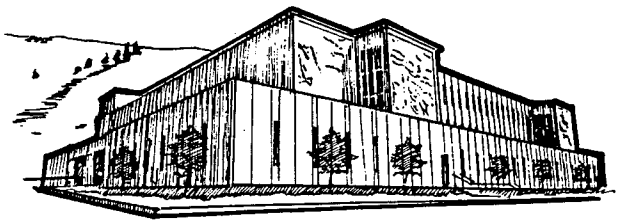

Beyond the Golden Haze:

Women and Representation in To the Lighthouse

By

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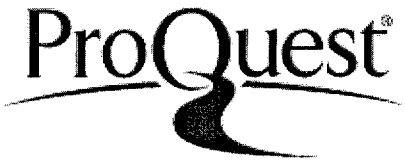

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Beyond the Golden Haze: Women and Representation in To the Lighthouse

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This thesis uses a psychoanalytical feminist approach to explore the mother-daughter relationship between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's novel To the Lighthouse. Drawing from Nancy Chodorow's sociological studies of how a woman's identity is formed by her preoedipal bond with her mother, this paper examines how Woolf dramatizes Lily's struggle for autonomy as a single woman-artist in a culture that insists women marry and have children, a belief very strongly held and exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay. Using Margaret Homans' analysis of Freudian and Lacanian myths of female development, we see how Woolf uses Lily's process of representing Mrs. Ramsay as subject of her painting to deconstruct cultural myths associating women with nature (including physical objects) and the "literal, the absent referent in our predominant myth of language," as Homans writes. Through her depiction of Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's concerns and motivations as artists, Woolf is shown to revise the ways in which maternal presences and absences are valued, and describes a basis for seeing that is distinctively female. These maternal presences and absences are also mirrored in Woolf's style of writing.

Mrs. Ramsay's "artistry" is examined as an extension of her idealization of domesticity, rather that as an account of her privately held doubts about her roles as wife and mother. Lily's artistry is measured by her increasing ability to recognize her own experience as a valid subject for her art. Lily's autonomy grows as she accepts the duplicitous nature of her bond with Mrs. Ramsay: Lily must accept separation, as well as connection, as an integral part of this mother-daughter relationship. Autonomy from Mrs. Ramsay allows Lily to represent Mrs. Ramsay as subject of her painting, rather than as the object of her daughterly desires. Lily sees beyond the "golden haze" of masculine desire in which Victorian women are typically represented. In her recognition of Mrs. Ramsay's suffering, as well as the ways in which Mrs. Ramsay valued the creative process over any physical artifact, Lily comes to dignify not only herself through her art, but Mrs. Ramsay as well.

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Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are there for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement....Yet this relationship has been minimalized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy.

Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born

And then there is the matter of my mother's abandonment of me. Again, this is the common experience. They walk ahead of us, and walk too fast, and forget us, they are so lost in thoughts of their own, and soon or late they disappear. The only mystery is that we expect it to be otherwise.

Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping

I

Subjects and Objects:
An Introduction and Background

vividly asserts, requires the death of the mother.

The culturally-imposed view of "woman" as an object of representation, as opposed to a subject, is one of the central concerns of this paper, and I will look at the ways in which Woolf responds to this problem in her novel To the Lighthouse. The implications of this myth are many when one considers the ways in which Woolf chooses to represent both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, as well as these characters' concerns and motivations as artists. This paper will discuss the ways in which each woman chooses to represent her life, as well as the cultural context in which their art is created. I will also look at the ways in which women in To the Lighthouse, in Homans' words, "embrace this connection [with the literal, with nature], not for the same reasons for which androcentric culture identifies women and the literal, but for reasons having to do with women's development and identity" (5). These issues will be viewed through the lens of the mother-daughter relationship between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. Woolf, through her deconstruction of western myths concerning the representation of women, revises the ways in which maternal presence and absence are valued. In doing so, she describes a basis for see ng and creating that is distinctively female.

Homans arrives at her observations about womer s place in language through psychoanalysis. She shows that che identification of women with the absent referent i predicated on Freudian and Lacanian models that re ire the son's "renunciation" of his mother as he enters th symbolic

order, the law of the father: language. In this male child's new system of communication, which Homans says is triggered by the child's simultaneous acquisition of language and awareness of sexual difference, the mother's primary presence is, in effect, replaced by language. No longer does this child "communicate with the mother's presence without mediation" (6). As Homans explains, "The father, who is discovered to have been in possession of the mother, intervenes in the potentially incestuous dyad of the mother and child. Because what marks the father is his possession of the phallus," Homans continues, "the phallus becomes the mark of sexual difference, that is, of difference from the mother" (6). And, according to Lacanian theory, in this new system of communication, which, like the sign system of language itself, is based on difference, it is the father's phallus that becomes the "copula" or "hyphen" that would "restore the connection between children and mothers." But "because its use in this way is denied by the father to the child, however," Homans explains, "it [the phallus] is perpetually missing" (7). As Homans states,

> It is, by this logic, because of the <u>lack</u> of the phallus, not by its possession, that the child enters with such enthusiasm into the Law of the Father, for it is symbolic language alone that can approximate this bridging of the gap between child and mother opened up by the simultaneous arousal and prohibition of incest. Language promises to cross, even while operating through dependence on,

> that gap. Thus language becomes what Lacan calls desire.

Homans goes on to point out the androcentricism of this myth, explaining that "while Lacanian language assumes the lack of the phallus, it is only those who can lack it--those who might once have had it, as sons believe their fathers have--who are privileged to substitute for it symbolic language; daughters lack this lack" (9). Thus, the "son's search for substitutes for the forbidden body of his mother will therefore constitute, not a universal human condition, but a specifically male desire, the desire of the son who must renounce his mother" (9). Further placing this psychological phenomenon into the context of language, Homans writes,

> What the son searches for, in searching for substitutes for the mother's forbidden body, is a series of figures; 'something like his mother....' Figuration, then, and the definition of all language as figuration gain their hyperbolical cultural valuation from a specifically male standpoint because they allow the son, both as erotic being and as speaker, to flee from the mother as well as [from] the lost referent with which she is primordially identified. (9).

To explain a daughter's experience of acculturation, Homans turns to Nancy Chodorow's investigation of female development, to the daughter's lengthy preoedipal bond with her mother, that time in which "no gap has yet opened up

between signifier and signified," as Terry Eagleton puts it (Homans 6), or, as Chodorow herself says, an attachment which leads girls "to experience themselves as less separate [from their mothers] than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries" (93). Whereas the son's "break" with the mother occurs at about eighteen months (Homans 6), Homans cites Chodorow's findings that a girl's "preoedipal attachment to her mother lasts...often into her fourth or fifth year" (12). Although she acknowledges that Luce Irigaray does not share Chodorow's belief that this preoedipal attachment is continued past the oedipal phase, Homans quotes Irigaray to explain the implications of this "presymbolic language in our present culture: 'Nourir a lieu avant toute figure' (Nourishing takes place before there are any images/any symbols/any faces)" (14). Homans goes on to explain:

> The mother's and daughter's earliest relation takes place prior to the distancing of one from the other that would give either of them a visible face, and also, most importantly, prior to figuration or to the symbolic order. Unlike the son, the daughter, in Chodorow's view, does not give up this belief in communication that takes place in presence rather than in absence, in the dyadic relation with the mother, and prior to figuration. (14)

As I will discuss in chapter three, "Merging and Meaning," Lily Briscoe longs to paint Mrs. Ramsay as a subject throughout To the Lighthouse, but is unable to until

she accepts separation from her as a part of "ordinary experience" (300), as an integral part of the mother-daughter relationship. Lily's wish for "communication that takes place in presence rather than absence," as Homans puts it, presupposes the terror of separation from Mrs. Ramsay that she feels both before and after Mrs. Ramsay's death. In many ways, Lily's daughterly relationship with Mrs. Ramsay is the very thing that initially prevents her from depicting Mrs. Ramsay as a subject, and not as the object of her own daughterly desires. As Marianne Hirsch points out in The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, representation of the mother "is controlled by her object status, but her discourse, when it is voiced," Hirsch continues, "moves her from object to subject. But, as long as she speaks as mother, she must always remain the object in her child's process of subject-formation; she is never fully a subject" (12). Reaching beyond the idealized versions of Mrs. Ramsay that reinforce her status as object, Lily wants to see her differently, not as the archetypal mother, as so many others in the novel want to see her, but as the woman who "clapped her deer-stalker's hat on her head, or ran across the grass, or scolded Kennedy, the gardener" (264). Significantly, while Lily paints Mrs. Ramsay with her son in the first part of the novel, she paints her alone at the end of the novel. In accepting her emotional and physical separations from Mrs. Ramsay as a daughter, Lily is well on her way to accepting their very different values regarding their roles as women in Victorian

culture.

While I draw extensively from contemporary psychoanalytical feminist criticism to explore these issues, I should point out that these revisionist ideas about the early mother-daughter relationship are not new. In fact, in her book, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis, Elizabeth Abel discusses Virginia Woolf's affiliations to German psychoanalyst and theorist Melanie Klein, who, as Abel states, "devoted her career to writing the mother-infant plot" (9). Abel is quick to point out Woolf's ambivalence toward psychoanalysis, noting that Woolf claims not to have read Freud until 1939, even though she and her husband published his Collected Papers with Hogarth Press in 1924-25 (19). In addition, Abel reports that Woolf disputes "not psychoanalytic interpretations of infantile experience but a colonization of the literary field that transforms 'character' into 'cases' through the application of a doctrinal 'key' that 'simplifies rather than complicates'" (17). Commenting on Woolf's early preference for Kleinian psychoanalysis over Freudian psychoanalysis, Abel writes,

> Woolf's relationship to psychoanalysis was not monolithic: many of her objections to Freudian theory do not apply to the discourse launched by Klein, which de-emphasizes sexuality, values the aesthetic, and perhaps, most importantly, calls into question the prevailing hierarchy of gender. (19)

Of particular interest here is that "at the crossroads

act of painting for Lily, as well as on the nonrepresentational style in which she paints, Woolf provides an alternative mode of representation that "does not actively victimize the mother," as Homans suggests (286). While I will spend a great deal of time pointing to the ways in which representation negatively affects women, I will also discuss the necessity of representation for women. Only by beginning to represent themselves and each other can women begin to define themselves as subjects.

***

I do not attempt an biographical approach to To the Lighthouse, linking Virginia Woolf's relationship with her own mother to this novel, in large part because I wish to respect Woolf's claim that by writing this novel, she laid that relationship "to rest." Woolf explains,

> I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long and very deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and laid it to rest. (Hirsch 108-109)

But because Woolf devotes so much of the final third of her novel to Lily's search for her lost mother, it can be said that Woolf utilizes, at least in part, a very daughterly approach to her subject. The fact that Woolf portrays Lily

as an artist, and not as Mrs. Ramsay's actual daughter, undoubtedly helped Woolf to gain the distance from her own mother that she must have needed in her writing of this book. In some ways, Lily's art can be seen as a very healthy alternative to her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay, insofar as it allowed her to recreate a more satisfying relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. Perhaps the same is true in Woolf's case, or, perhaps Lily's (and Woolf's) project to see and represent Mrs. Ramsay as subject is doomed from the start, for, as Hirsch suggests, mothers are more often than not reduced to objects of their daughters' desires.

That Lily should so passionately desire to see Mrs. Ramsay as a subject, to represent that which is "hers indisputably" (76) is an admirable first step, however, especially when one considers her strong attachment to Mrs. Ramsay, as well as their strong differences. Because we live in a culture that privileges the representation of the individual over people living in relationship to one another, it is easy to minimize the significance of the psychological accuracy with which Woolf portrays the mother-daughter relationship in this novel, to measure Lily's success as an artist by her ability to put her own attachments aside in order to see Mrs. Ramsay as a subject. The subjectivity of the artist, however, is of primary interest to Woolf. As Lily says toward the end of the novel, "Half one's notions of other people were, after all, grotesque. They served private purposes of one's own" (293). The subject of Lily's painting must finally be seen

as Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship, as defined by Lily.

Just as Lily seeks to discover the woman beneath the surface of Mrs. Ramsay's identity as wife and mother, so do I. Simply dismissing Mrs. Ramsay for her lack of sensitivity towards Lily, while sometimes tempting, is not an option when one considers the complex psychological and aesthetic portrait Woolf creates in Mrs. Ramsay's moments of solitude in the first section of the novel. Through her use of narrated monologue, which I will discuss in chapter three, "Merging and Meaning," Woolf offers us a view of Mrs. Ramsay's private, as well as her public, life, thus increasing our empathy for her significantly. We are able to see the disparity between Mrs. Ramsay's statement "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (77) and her private doubts about marriage and relationships between men and women, which are, in fact, particularized by her own emotional exhaustion and eventual death.

Just as Mrs. Ramsay's role as "angel in the house" demands that she serve others, so too does the "artistic moment" she creates at the dinner party. At the beginning of this party, Mrs. Ramsay feels that "the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating" (126) rests with her. She lives up to this responsibility in the moment of unity she creates among her family members and guests towards the end of the party. While Lily comes to recognize Mrs. Ramsay's gift for creating these harmonizing moments, she must also come to recognize the role that separation and difference

plays in her own life and art. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Lily recognizes the need to represent this side of life in her art as well. Perhaps the most poignant evidence Woolf gives us of Lily's ability to depict Mrs. Ramsay as a subject is Lily's recognition and subsequent portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay's suffering. Woolf denotes this process with Lily's recovery of Mrs. Ramsay's "wedge-shaped core of darkness," which, as I will show in chapter five, "With Fifty Pairs of Eyes," becomes a symbol of Mrs. Ramsay's repressed pain early on in the novel.

Woolf appears to pay Mrs. Ramsay a good deal of homage as an artist as well, when one considers that so many of Woolf's stylistic choices and aesthetic concerns are mirrored in Mrs. Ramsay's "art." At the height of her artistic moment during the dinner party, for instance, Mrs. Ramsay has the sense that she is "unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings" (160), just as Woolf herself does through her use of a narrator who moves with such seamless clarity from the thoughts of one character into those of another. Certainly Mrs. Ramsay's desire to make of the moments something expansive and glittering was one Woolf had as well. After all, the success of Mrs. Ramsay's creation can be measured only by its representation in language by Woolf. Indeed, just as she does with Lily, Woolf comments on the limits of representation through Mrs. Ramsay's "art," in which "representation" is simultaneous with experience. As a child, Cam, Mrs. Ramsay's youngest daughter, epitomized the

speed of vision for Mrs. Ramsay, the mystery inherent in all unnameable things. This mystery is something Woolf moves toward throughout her writing:

> She was off like a bird, bullet, or arrow, impelled by what desire, shot by whom, at what directed, who could say...It might be a vision--of a shell, of a wheelbarrow, of a fairy kingdom on the far side of the hedge; or it might be the glory of speed; no one knew. (84)

Finally, through her relationship with Cam, Mrs. Ramsay mirrors Woolf's own reverence for the nonverbal, even the preverbal. As I will discuss in chapter three, "Merging and Meaning," Woolf evokes the rhythms of the mother-daughter relationship in her own style of writing. Paradoxically, both Woolf and Mrs. Ramsay are able to express the primacy of this relationship through the use of language. Both women create meaning out of the rhythm and texture of words, and by giving body and shape to language, evoke the bodily communication that takes place between mothers and daughters. Homans uses Woolf's description of the way in which Mrs. Ramsay coaxes Cam to sleep to show the ways in which this preverbal, indeed, bodily communication takes place between mothers and daughters:

> She could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam's mind, and Cam was repeating after her how it was like a mountain, a bird's nest, a garden, and there were little antelopes, speaking still more monotonously, and more

> rhythmically and more nonsensically, now she must shut her eyes and go to sleep and dream of mountains, and valleys and stars falling and parrots and antelopes and gardens, and everything lovely, she said, raising her head very slowly and speaking more and more mechanically, until she sat upright and saw that Cam was asleep. (17)

Homans explains that "the aim of Mrs. Ramsay's talk is not to represent mountains or other distant objects, but rather to reassure Cam of her own sheltering presence" (17). While Homans acknowledges that "there is a gap between the signifier 'mountain' and an actual mountain," she writes that "there is no gap at all between Mrs. Ramsay's words and her bodily presence for her daughter." She explains that

> her words do not so much signify the far-off places they allude to as enact the present contact between mother and daughter, a contact emphasized by the way Cam repeats her mother's words. The words matter as sounds, monotonous and rhythmic, issuing from and returning to the body. (18)

While Mrs. Ramsay is very much present for her children, she is not emotionally available for Lily. This paper will explore the role that culture plays in both Lily's desires and Mrs. Ramsay's unavailability, as well as the ways in which Lily crosses this wide gap between herself and Mrs. Ramsay in her art.

II

An Aesthetics of Silence

Interestingly, Woolf chooses not to quote the actual words Mrs. Ramsay uses to usher her daughter into sleep, and, through this choice, evokes the silence surrounding her words. In fact, the many instances of non-verbal communication in To the Lighthouse, especially on the part of women, support both Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's, indeed Woolf's general sense that language cannot fully communicate their thoughts and ideas. Probably the most poignant instance of Mrs. Ramsay's ability to communicate without words occurs at the end of the first section of the novel when she expresses her love for Mr. Ramsay: "she looked up at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew" (186). This mode of communication between Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay is clearly a trademark of their relationship and something that draws them to each other. In her linguistic analysis, "Unmaking and Making in To the Lighthouse," Gayatri Spivak emphasizes the sense of power that Mrs. Ramsay achieves through this exchange: "In the end she turns her refusal of discourse into an exclamation of triumph" (312). In the third section of the novel, Lily remembers Mrs. Ramsay's silence:

> She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side)

by saying them? (255)

While there are probably more ways in which Mrs. Ramsay's silence is ultimately self-destructive rather than empowering, she does develop a very highly-tuned sense of the world, which we might describe as her own "aesthetics of silence." Even though Mrs. Ramsay's aesthetic of silence grows out of the very intimate connection that Margaret Homans suggests women have with the physical world, this aesthetic also encompasses a far more troubling silence from which Mrs. Ramsay cannot emerge. Stemming from the sense of division between the role that society demands she play and the profoundly imaginative woman she is, this silence prevents her from representing in her "art" much of the very rich inner life that she leads.

Perhaps as a result of her lack of faith in language, Mrs. Ramsay takes an almost physical pleasure in looking at the things of this world. In her virtually orgasmic response to watching the beam of the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay

> looked at the steady light...as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight...and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her

> mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough! (100)

And, true to Homans' argument, unlike several of the males in this novel, Mrs. Ramsay observes the objects of the physical world without transforming them into metaphors for the self. As we will discuss in the next chapter, "Merging and Meaning," Spivak suggests that in Mrs. Ramsay's relationship with the physical world, she is "the object not the subject, the other not the self" (313). On the very first page of the novel, Woolf shows the tendency towards figuration on the part of her male characters by showing James transform his mother into, of all things, a refrigerator:

> Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystalize and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss. (9)

Woolf very aptly contrasts Mrs. Ramsay's almost sensual awareness of the physical world with the male tendency

towards figuration when she shows the disparity between Mrs. Ramsay's and Mr. Tansley's response to a man posting a sign for a circus. Mr. Tansley uses the circus as a springboard into his life. He moves rapidly from the poster to thoughts about circuses in general and finally to statements to Mrs. Ramsay about why his family never went to circuses:

> It was a large family, nine brothers and sisters, and his father was a working man. "My father is a chemist, Mrs. Ramsay. He keeps a shop." He himself had paid his own way since he was thirteen. Often he went without a greatcoat in winter. (21-22)

We already know that the Ramsay children dislike Mr. Tansley because "when they talked about something interesting...then what they complained of about Charles Tansley was that until he had turned the whole thing round and made it somehow reflect himself and disparage them--he was not satisfied" (16).

While we see the ways in which Mr. Tansley reads his own life into this action, we also sense the intensity of Mrs. Ramsay's visual experience of watching this man post the sign. Her observation of this act signals a switch in point of view on the part of a narrator who floats without warning from the mind of one character into that of another. The passage begins with Mr. Tansley's question, which he asks when he realizes Mrs. Ramsay is not paying any attention to him: "A fellowship, a professorship, he felt capable of anything and saw himself--but what was she

looking at?" The narrator then enters the thoughts of Mrs Ramsay to answer,

> At a man pasting a bill. The vast sheet flattened itself out, and each shove of the brush revealed fresh legs, hoops, horses, glistening reds and blues, beautifully smooth, until half the wall was covered with the advertisement of a circus; a hundred horsemen, twenty performing seals, lions, tigers... (20-21)

Woolf brings Mrs. Ramsay's visual experience to life with verbs like "flattened" and "shoved," with colors like the "glistening reds and blues" and with sheer numbers: "a hundred horsemen, twenty performing seals." Not only does this example show Mrs. Ramsay's sheer enjoyment of the physical world and Charles Tansley's propensity for seeing himself in these things of the world, but it also suggests Mrs. Ramsay's absolute disinterest in the abstract nature of the ideas to which Mr. Tansley's words refer: "his subject now was the influence of something upon somebody--they were walking on and Mrs. Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there... dissertation...fellowship...readership...lectureship" (22). Mrs. Ramsay's interest in these words is for their sensual properties, as a collection of sounds, or hypnotic repetitions and rhythms.

Time and time again in this novel, Woolf underlines these differences in male and female perception. As Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay walk through their garden, the narrator

highlights Mr. Ramsay's lack of sensitivity to the natural world: "He did not look at the flowers, which his wife was considering, but at a spot about a foot or so above them" (102). And when Mr. Ramsay does "notice" the flowers, it is with extreme vagueness: "These flowers seemed creditable, Mr. Ramsay said, lowering his gaze and noticing something red, something brown" (102). Mrs. Ramsay is acutely aware that she and her husband perceive the world differently. It is with some frustration that she thinks,

> Indeed he seemed to her sometimes made differently from other people, born blind, deaf, and dumb to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle's. His understanding often astonished her. But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef? He would sit at table with them like a person in a dream. (107)

These different modes of perception create a distinct sense of separation between Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay is all too well aware that her husband cannot share in the pleasure that the world gives her. Woolf continues,

> And looking up, she saw above the thin trees the first pulse of the full-throbbing star, and wanted to make her husband look at it; for the sight gave her such keen pleasure. But she stopped herself. He never looked at things. (108)

Indeed, the gap between subject and object that Homans refers to is reflected in this gap between the ways in which Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay perceive the world. While Mrs. Ramsay is engaged in the physicality of experience, Mr. Ramsay is mainly interested in transforming the physical into mental phenomena. As Mrs. Ramsay points out, he did not "notice the view." Rather, he sat among his family members "like someone in a dream."

***

Throughout the first section of this novel, Mrs. Ramsay displays a very keen visual sense of the world, as well as a intense desire to describe what she sees. Looking out the window at rooks she has become so familiar with that she actually names two of them, Mrs. Ramsay thinks,

> They all went up again, and the air was shoved aside by their black wings and cut into exquisite scimitar shapes. The movement of the wings beating out, out, out--she could never describe it accurately enough to please herself--was one of the loveliest of all to her. (122)

Perhaps it is Mrs. Ramsay's fear of being "finer" (61) than her husband that prevents her from even attempting to transform her extremely fine-tuned sense of the world into words, much less art. Perhaps it is Mr. Tansley's chorus of "women can't write, women can't paint" (130) that keeps Mrs. Ramsay in her place, as it does Lily for so long. That Mrs. Ramsay "could never describe [the rooks] accurately enough

to please herself" (emphasis mine) may suggest however that her own perceptions are so finely-tuned that they cannot be easily transformed into words. In other words, Mrs. Ramsay's doubt may in fact stem from her sense of aesthetics, rather than a lack of confidence.

While much has been written about the inherent artistry of the "moment" that Mrs. Ramsay creates at the dinner party, there is a very wide gap between Mrs. Ramsay's "art" and her experience. Rather, Mrs. Ramsay's "art" becomes, in its harmony and perfection, an expression of her Victorian idealization of marriage and motherhood. Marianne Hirsch discusses the high personal expense of these moments to Mrs. Ramsay:

> Mrs. Ramsay's stance as an artist is, for women, a dangerous one to live up to because her aesthetic perfection is bought at the expense of her life. Her successes at establishing harmony, permanence, and order...causes in Mrs. Ramsay a strain she cannot survive, precisely because her medium is interpersonal and not aesthetic...she can hide the irredeemable areas of contradiction and disconnection. She can do so, however, only by absorbing that discord, just as she absorbs the disagreements between herself and her husband. (112)

Although Mrs. Ramsay possesses extremely developed powers of perception, her adherence to Victorian ideals of marriage and motherhood prevents her from sharing her most private

experiences of the world. Rather, Mrs. Ramsay's "art" exists within the culturally-defined limits Hirsch describes, those of "harmony, permanence and order." Created out of an interest for others, Mrs. Ramsay's "art" cannot contain the chaos that she does in fact recognize at the heart of domesticity, her knowledge, for example, that as mother and wife, she gave and gave "until there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent" (60). By denying or repressing these feelings, Mrs. Ramsay only intensifies her sense of chaos. This chaos becomes for Mrs. Ramsay a further cause as well as an effect of repression, and perhaps, finally, a leading cause of her death. As Hirsch suggests, Mrs. Ramsay can "hide the irredeemable areas of contradiction and disconnection...only by absorbing that discord." In this way, we can enlarge the concept of Mrs. Ramsay's "aesthetics of silence" to encompass the silence that surrounds her private experience of the world as a result of her negative feelings about domesticity.

Mrs. Ramsay's conscious attempt to move away from chaos can be seen in her responses to her "outraged and anguished" husband. She is relieved when he too represses his powerful emotions, that "the ruin was veiled; domesticity triumphed; custom crooned its soothing rhythm" (49). Frustrated with her children's inclination toward "strife, divisions, differences of opinion, prejudices," Mrs. Ramsay believes that such dissent "twisted into the very fibre of being." She deplores, "oh, that they should begin so early...They

were so critical, her children" (17). And yet, her own sense of "division" between the woman Mrs. Ramsay tries so hard to be and the woman she cannot repress "twist[s] into the very fibre" of Mrs. Ramsay's being. The disparity between Mrs. Ramsay's apparent sense of harmony and her private sense of terror is very large. In her most private moments, terror and separation override Mrs. Ramsay's sense of harmony and her ecstatic moment is replaced by "a ghostly roll of drums":

> the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo of her thoughts...at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was as ephemeral as a rainbow--this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (27-28)

As Louise Poresky points out in The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels, "The sea comforts Mrs. Ramsay, yet also terrifies her." Poresky asserts that

"this ambiguity reflects her two identities: the conscious one of her social role and the unconscious one of her self. She fears that her first identity will overpower the second" (136). While many of the previous examples show Mrs. Ramsay's Victorian conception of domesticity as an ideally harmonious institution, Poresky shows the doubt that underlies such values, even for Mrs. Ramsay, thus revealing what Sheila Rowbotham would call Mrs. Ramsay's "dual consciousness."

In her essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves," Susan Stanford Friedman turns to Sheila Rowbotham's Woman's Consciousness, Man's World to explore the implications of woman's dual consciousness. Rowbotham builds on Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "woman is not born, but made" (38), helping us to see that Mrs. Ramsay's silence is, in many ways, culturally derived. Her movement away from trying to express the woman she is beneath the veneer of domesticity does create her profound sense of internal division. Rowbotham writes,

> But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity....The manner in which we knew ourselves was at variance with ourselves as an historical being-woman. (39)

In effect, this silence, or sense of "dislocation" in Victorian culture, leaves Mrs. Ramsay in the most silent of realms, that of her "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (95). Placing this phenomenon of non-being, to borrow Woolf's phrase, into a psychological context, Nancy Chodorow points to the ways in which unacknowledged difference between the ways in which men and women read "emotional and social" situations may contribute to this profound sense of isolation:

> Being empty of oneself--a feeling of lack of self, or emptiness...This happens especially when a person who has this feeling is with others who read the social and emotional setting differently but do not recognize this, nor recognize that the person herself is in a different world...Women who feel empty of themselves feel that they are not being accorded a separate reality nor the agency to interpret the world in their own way.

And yet, while the negative implications of such an existence on Mrs. Ramsay's self-image are profound, one cannot overlook the sense of escape, indeed freedom from the self-sacrificing responsibilities of domesticity, that Mrs. Ramsay feels in this state of "non-being." Referring to her children, she thinks,

> It was a relief when they went to bed. For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of--to think; well, not even

> to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. (96)

Compared to the moment Mrs. Ramsay creates at the dinner party, these thoughts more accurately reflect her experience of being "invisible to others." But while such thoughts can be seen as an integral part of the artistic process, thoughts in and of themselves cannot qualify as art; like speech, art is implicitly defined as something that is revealed or shared with others. Indeed, art transforms experience. Mrs. Ramsay's aesthetics of silence prevents transformation in this case, except in the most private, limited sense. As Hirsch concludes, "Even in the moments when she is alone and sees herself a 'wedge-shaped core of darkness,'...we realize that the archetypal mother...can claim for herself only silence, emptiness and darkness, not presence and plenitude" (112-113).

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After Mrs. Ramsay's death, the Ramsay's summer house is left

to ruin: "the swallows nested in the drawing-room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots" (207). It is as though the chaos that Mrs. Ramsay carried inside of her was suddenly unleashed upon the household she once strained to hold together. In "Time Passes," we see just how far an aesthetic of silence can be carried. But most of all, we learn that in the end, such silence cannot be endured.

Until Mrs. McNab appears, this section of the novel is annihilatingly unpeopled. Here we have things in themselves, without interpretation by other characters. This quality is startlingly apparent in the narrative context of this novel because the narrator is suddenly without a consciousness through which to speak. This is an abrupt change for the reader who has grown accustomed to moving with such fluidity from the mind of one character into that of another. In "Time Passes," the majority of objects are presented without their intended human purpose; cleverly suggesting this sense of absence by presenting the few objects that "kept the human shape," Woolf writes,

> What people had shed and left--a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes--those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animate; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking-glass had held a face. (194)

Similarly, Woolf shows the sudden disintegration of metaphor itself with her own highly metaphorical language. A curtain is drawn that conceals objects that once reflected humanity:

> It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling; the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. (193)

This passage is perhaps Woolf's strongest inditement against words as appropriate signifiers of truth. In fact, the whole idea of metaphor becomes almost farcical here. We look at objects and do not see ourselves; or, perhaps even more poignantly, objects no longer see us: "The flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless and so terrible" (203).

Interestingly, in this context of an "aesthetic of silence," Spivak describes one of the dominant objects in this section, Mrs. Ramsay's shawl, as

> a silent writing that envelops sound: "The

> swaying mantle of silence which, week after week in the empty room, wove into the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout, and folded them round the house in silence." (317)

Not only do objects no longer reflect us, but they swallow the other things of this world that denote us as well. And while it is true that Mrs. McNab's presence ultimately "halts disaster in this allegory of reason menaced by madness" (319) as Spivak describes this section of the novel, the image we see of Mrs. McNab in the mirror is one of confusion verging on meaninglessness. Because the narrator does not choose, at least initially, to enter Mrs. McNab's consciousness, we first encounter her as yet another indecipherable object within this scene:

> Rubbing the glass of the long looking-glass and leering sideways at her swinging figure a sound issued from her lips--something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps, had been hummed and danced to, but now, coming from the toothless, bonneted, care-taking woman, was robbed of meaning, was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again, so that as she lurched, dusting, wiping, she seemed to say how it was one long sorrow and trouble. (196-197)

Despite Mrs. McNab though, Woolf does not present this vision of silence without a touch of Mrs. Ramsay's

insistence on perfection and beauty: "loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted." And, as if in tribute to Mrs. Ramsay's aesthetics of silence, Woolf continues, "Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom" (195). Nevertheless, Woolf's juxtaposition of Mrs. Ramsay's momentary appreciation of the beautiful in the first section with such devastating images of ruin in the second section, sharply calls into question Mrs. Ramsay's version of reality.

Interestingly, Woolf does give silence a voice in this section when the remaining characters return to the house:

> Indeed the voice might resume, as the curtains of dark wrapped themselves over the house, over Mrs. Beckwith, Mr. Carmichael, and Lily Briscoe so that they lay with several folds of blackness on their eyes, why not accept this, be content with this, acquiesce and resign? (214)

Spivak points out that it is not clear what the "this" in this quote refers to and concludes, "we are free to say this 'this' is the limits of language" (319). So, in this section, we are asked by the voice of silence itself to accept Mrs. Ramsay's aesthetics of silence, her belief that "...things [are] spoilt...by saying them" (255). Sifting through the minds of the sleepers, this voice of silence appears to be speaking to Lily, the artist in this novel who sits "bolt upright in bed. Awake" (214). And that this voice should address Lily is not surprising, since Lily's

properness of a vision?" Her answer contains the connection between silence and expression for Lily. Spivak writes, "Through declaring the indefiniteness (a kind of absence) as a definiteness (a kind of presence)" (322). Subsequent chapters will explore Lily's discovery that giving expression to silence itself is in fact a way of breaking silence. Lily must attempt to do for Mrs. Ramsay that which Mrs. Ramsay, in her silence, can not do for herself.

III

Merging and Meaning

Mrs. Ramsay's attraction to the physical world is such that she often imagines herself merging with the things that she looks at. Looking at the beam of the lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, "one could not help attaching oneself to one thing, especially to the things one saw." She continues, "It was odd... how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one, in a sense were one" (97). While Mrs. Ramsay's sense of being one with the world does, at first glance, remind one of Mr. Tansley's projection of himself onto the world, Mrs. Ramsay's relationship to the physical world is much less self-centered. After citing Mrs. Ramsay's "refusal of discourse" as her first type of "privileged moment," Gayatri Spivak goes on the state that Mrs. Ramsay's second kind of privileged moment is "when she leans toward inanimate things." But unlike Mr. Tansley's egocentric act, Spivak explains that "the structure of [Mrs. Ramsay's] reflection is that of...self-mirroring in the other. Within that structure...she is...the object not the subject, the other not the self. The moment of self-privilege is now its own preservative yielding to the world of things" (313). Quoting Nancy Chodorow, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman explains this relationship to the world in terms of the mother-daughter relationship in her book <u>The Invisible Presence</u>: "Because of this extended, unresolved relationship, more women than men tend to experience 'boundary confusion and a lack of

separateness from the world'" (13). Rosenman explains, "Women are more likely to feel a part of their environment and more closely tied to other people throughout life, to be more empathetic and less autonomous than men" (13). As I will discuss later in this chapter, these inclinations on the part of women are, as Julia Kristeva puts it, a result of women's "positionality" rather than "essence" (Moi 166). In other words, these tendencies are a function of a culture in which women mother, rather than of biology.

In an essay written before the publication of Nancy Chodorow's influential work, Susan Squire traces this "mirror encounter" with the physical world back to the earliest relationship between mothers and their infants: "In the mother's face, the baby desires to see not merely that familiar image of the other, but the unfamiliar image of the self" (275). Squire goes on to quote D.W. Winnicott to further explain this "mirroring" phenomenon: "Ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby and <u>what she looks like is related to what she sees there</u>" (275).

Explaining the profound effect this mirroring experience has on the infant, Squire explains, "One day the nursing infant cradled in the mother's arms looks up into her face; what the infant finds there can shape the child's future personality and action in the world" (274-275). Because of her strong belief in marriage, the image that Mrs. Ramsay reflects of Lily is a very negative one that relegates her to the role of spinster. As Squire suggests,

Lily paints Mrs. Ramsay as a way of freeing herself from "her dependence on Mrs. Ramsay to mirror--and so create--her" (283). This chapter will explore the ways in which Lily's daughterly need to be mirrored by Mrs. Ramsay, or to "become one" with her, as Lily puts it, necessitates an even stronger need for Lily to accept her sense of separation from her as a means of establishing autonomy. This chapter will conclude with a section on how these issues of connection and separation are mirrored in Woolf's styles of writing as well.

While Mrs. Ramsay is "empathetic" to the point of being overbearing in her relationships with her husband and children, she distances herself emotionally from other women, such as Lily, who wants so badly to identify with her. Both of these modes of relating to others may in fact be symptoms of the same problem. Chodorow describes a kind of "pseudoempathy" that is "based on projection rather than any real perception or understanding of an infant's needs" (205). Applying Chodorow's theory to Mrs. Ramsay's adult relationships, we can see the ways in which she projects her idealized versions of motherhood and marriage onto the people around her. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mrs. Ramsay attempts to suppress the chaos of daily living, so that her husband's "ruin was veiled" and "domesticity triumphed" (49). Similarly, Mrs. Ramsay refuses to take Lily's concerns seriously, such as Lily's ambition as an artist and lack of interest in marriage. The first image we get of Lily, ironically enough, is through Mrs. Ramsay's

eyes, even though it is Mrs. Ramsay sitting for the portrait:

> She was supposed to be keeping her head as much in the same position as possible for Lily's picture. Lily's picture! Mrs. Ramsay smiled. With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously... (29)

The syntax of this last sentence suggests that Mrs. Ramsay would not take Lily seriously as a painter <u>because</u> she would never marry.

In addition to projecting her values concerning her roles as wife and mother into her "art," then, Mrs. Ramsay also projects these values onto other people. Not only does this projection serve to validate Mrs. Ramsay's image of herself as a wife and mother in Victorian culture, but it also contributes to the lack of intimacy between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay's strong connection with objects may in fact be a substitute of sorts for the genuine bonds she cannot forge with other women. As I will explain in the next section when I look at Mrs. Ramsay in relation to her actual daughters, once her daughters are old enough to establish their own relationships with men, they are expected to do so. As a result, even Mrs. Ramsay's relationship to her own daughters becomes secondary to her relationship with her husband.

Ironically, this emotional distancing on the part of Mrs. Ramsay makes Lily desire to be close to her all the

more. Refusing to give up the primacy of her relationship with her "mother," Lily wonders,

> What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? (79)

This central question about whether one can merge to the point of "becoming...one with the object one adored" is one that Lily must resolve as she paints Mrs. Ramsay. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily's feelings of loss are intensified by the sense of maternal absence that Lily felt during Mrs. Ramsay's lifetime. Elizabeth Abel explains, "Never adequately available, Mrs. Ramsay confirms in death an absence that begins at birth" (69). While Abel's statement speaks to the impossibility of mothers ever fulfilling the general sense of longing for maternal presence some daughters carry throughout their lifetimes, Abel also suggests Mrs. Ramsay's particular lack of emotional availability to other women, especially to Lily. While Lily's desire for emotional intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay is very intense, perhaps based upon unresolved issues with her actual mother, (who, incidentally, is never mentioned in this novel), Lily's wish for a more intimate relationship with another woman is a natural outgrowth of women's mothering, according to Chodorow. She explains, "While women are likely to become and remain erotically

heterosexual, they are encouraged both by men's difficulty with love and by their own relational history with their mothers to look elsewhere [than to men] for love and emotional gratification" (200). Chodorow continues,

> One way women fulfill these needs is through the creation and maintenance of important personal relationships with women...These relationships are one way of resolving and recreating the mother-daughter bond and are an expression of women's general relational capacities and definition of self in relationship... (200)

Lily's act of painting Mrs. Ramsay helps her to mourn Mrs. Ramsay's unavailability and eventually come to terms with the ever-present sense of separation in their relationship. In addition, as I will discuss in the third section of this chapter, by painting Mrs. Ramsay, Lily comes to understand that the distance she feels between them is inextricably linked to Mrs. Ramsay's attitudes toward her role as a woman in Victorian culture. Lily must explore the ways in which she is different from Mrs. Ramsay and must accept this separation as an integral part of her bond to Mrs. Ramsay if she is to understand her well enough to tell the story of their relationship in her painting.

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While Mrs. Ramsay clearly refuses to play the role of mother to Lily, her desire to mother her own children could not be stronger. Woolf writes, "She would have liked always to

have had a baby. She was happiest carrying one in her arms" (90). Woolf's portrayal of the strong bond between Mrs. Ramsay and her children comprises some of the most poignant scenes in the novel. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this bond is mirrored in Woolf's style of writing as well. As pointed out at the end of chapter one, Mrs. Ramsay lulls her daughter Cam into sleep through the rhythms of her words, indeed, through her own "bodily presence," as Margaret Homans suggests. There are several other instances in To the Lighthouse in which Woolf suggests Chodorow's sense of boundarilessness between Mrs. Ramsay and her children. In the scene before the dinner party, Woolf points to the depth and mystery of this bond in Rose's ritualistic choosing of jewels for her mother to wear:

> She let Rose, particularly, take up this and then that, and hold her jewels against the black dress, for this little ceremony of choosing jewels, which was gone through every night, was what Rose liked best, she knew. She had some hidden reason of her own for attaching great importance to this choosing what her mother was to wear. What was the reason, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, standing still to let her clasp the necklace she had chosen, divining, through her own past, some deep, some buried, some quite speechless feeling that one had for one's mother at Rose's age. (122-123)

By allowing Rose to choose the jewels she will wear, "to take up this and then that, and hold the jewels against the

black dress," Mrs. Ramsay engages Rose in the "mirroring" relationship that Squire suggests. Mrs. Ramsay is implicitly mirrored in Rose's choosing of the jewels her mother will wear, as is Rose when Mrs. Ramsay "clasps the necklace she had chosen."

Interestingly, Mrs. Ramsay mingles her perception of her daughter with her own experience of being mothered, "divining, through her own past, some deep, some buried, some quite speechless feeling that one had for one's mother at Rose's age." Here, Woolf illustrates Chodorow's sense of interchangeability between the roles of mothering and being mothered. As Chodorow explains, part of the attraction to motherhood for women is its strong association to their own experience of being mothered: "the ability to parent derives from having experienced this kind of relationship oneself as a child and being able to regress...to the psychological state of this experience" (87).

While this scene between Rose and her mother shows Mrs. Ramsay's conscious awareness of the strong analogy between her present relationship with her children and her past relationship with her own mother, this connection between herself as an adult and as a child is more implicitly conveyed when Mrs. Ramsay becomes caught up in the whirlwind of her children's desires to play on the beach after the dinner party. The scene begins with Prue's private veneration of her mother and her own feelings of childishness:

"That's my mother," thought Prue. Yes; Minta

> should look at her; Paul Rayley should look at her. That is the thing itself, she felt, as if there were only one person like that in the world; her mother. And, from having been quite grown up, a moment before, talking with the others, she became a child again, and what they had been doing was a game, and would her mother sanction their game, or condemn it, she wondered. (174)

When Prue announces, "We thought of going down to the beach to watch the waves," Mrs. Ramsay suddenly changes from the archetypal mother Prue imagines her to be to archetypal (albeit sexualized) child, the child that Prue feels herself to be:

> Instantly, for no reason at all, Mrs. Ramsay became like a girl of twenty, full of gaiety. A mood of revelry suddenly took possession of her. Of course they must go; of course they must go, she cried, laughing; and running down the last three or four steps quickly, she began turning from one to the other and laughing...(175)

And yet, the moment of Mrs. Ramsay's joy dies as quickly and inexplicably as it is born: "'How I wish I could come with you!' she cried. But she was withheld by something so strong that she never even thought of asking herself what it was" (175-176).

Perhaps whatever keeps Mrs. Ramsay from dashing down to the waves with her children is the same thing that keeps her from developing close ties with Lily. As she steps back

into the house where her husband is waiting, Mrs. Ramsay is distracted by thoughts of the imminent marriage between Paul and Minta. Despite the smile that Mrs. Ramsay wears upon her lips as she enters the room where her husband sits, Mrs. Ramsay's joy is supplanted by the thought of Minta's elevated social status through marrying a man "with a wash-leather bag for his watch":

> But she would have liked to go, had it not been for the other thing, and tickled by the absurdity of her thought (how lucky to marry a man with a wash-leather bag for his watch) she went with a smile on her lips into the other room where her husband sat reading. (176)

While this "other thing" can be read as Mrs. Ramsay's love for her husband, it can also be looked at as Victorian propriety and convention, which demands Mrs. Ramsay's loyalty to her husband at the expense of her own desires. Once her daughters are old enough to establish their own relationships with men, Mrs. Ramsay is obligated to reestablish her primary relationship with her husband. Throughout this novel, this demand comes at the expense of relationships between women and tends to undermine these relationships. Mrs. Ramsay's reticence to play on the beach with her daughters parallels her inability even to have a friendship with Lily.

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Lily's frustration with her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay is

remembered early on in the novel: "Nothing happened! Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee. And yet, she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs. Ramsay's heart" (79). Rosenman shows the extreme problem of individuation for women that often accompanies such a strong desire to identify with the mother:

> The obsessive desire to merge with the mother--predicated on a painful sense of actual distance and even exclusion--makes any sense of individuation problematic. Lily's understanding of the ways in which she is different from Mrs. Ramsay is a highly charged and difficult one. (104)

To illustrate the complexity of this difficulty, Rosenman refers to the following passage to exemplify Lily's extreme dependence on Mrs. Ramsay even as she attempts to assert her difference from her: "She would urge herself exempt from the universal law [of marriage]; plead for it...Then, she remembered, she had laid her head on Mrs. Ramsay's lap and laughed and laughed" (104). Abel characterizes Lily's movement through the novel as one of negotiating boundaries with Mrs. Ramsay:

> Lily negotiates a relationship with her surrogate mother from the novel's beginning to end. Ambivalence towards Mrs. Ramsay pervades Lily's experience; she is buffeted by opposing impulses toward merger and autonomy in a pattern unbroken

> (and perhaps intensified) by Mrs. Ramsay's death. (68)

In other words, Lily's longing to be close to Mrs. Ramsay is complicated by her simultaneous need to establish her autonomy from Mrs. Ramsay and from the strong values about the role of women in Victorian culture. Recalling a previous conversation with Mrs. Ramsay, Lily remembers early on in the novel what she later comes to call Mrs. Ramsay's "mania" for marriage (261):

> [Mrs. Ramsay] insist[s] that she must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world whatever laurels might be tossed to her...or triumphs won by her...an unmarried woman (she took her hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life. (77)

Rather than seeking out a husband with whom to have children, though, Lily tends to seek emotional sustenance from her relationships with other women. She is what Julia Kristeva calls "mother-identified." As Toril Moi points out in Sexual/Textual Politics, this mother identification "will intensify the pre-Oedipal components and render her marginal to the symbolic order" (165) with which Mrs. Ramsay is outwardly associated through her unswerving adherence to the laws of patriarchy. These differing visions of themselves as women are at the heart of the silence or lack of emotional intimacy between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay and are the root cause of Lily's dissatisfaction with their relationship.

Given the differences between them, then, Lily's persistence in her attempt to understand Mrs. Ramsay well enough to represent her in a painting is quite laudable. It is as though Lily has some sense of the private life that Mrs. Ramsay does not share with others. Lily, after all, informs us of Mrs. Ramsay's "aesthetic of silence," her belief that "things are spoilt...by saying them" (255). From her observation of Mrs. Ramsay while she is still alive and because of her own experience with Mr. Ramsay after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily knows that it is Mrs. Ramsay's outward adherence to the values of patriarchy that is, in fact, so emotionally destructive to Mrs. Ramsay. Moi points out the importance of recognizing as a social construct the femininity that Mrs. Ramsay projects and experiences internally, as opposed to a biological or "essential" fact. She explains that while French critical theorists such as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray define femininity as "lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness--in short, as non-Being," Kristeva emphasizes this version of femininity as a "patriarchal construct," and in doing so, she "allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of <u>positionality</u> rather than of <u>essences</u>" (166). Mrs. Ramsay's "femininity" has been read until recently by critics in terms of ways it represents her "essence." For example, in his book <u>World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel</u>, James Naremore writes, "There are many places in the novel where we sense the contrast between the two views [a feminine and masculine view] of

life, which at times seem to represent the male and female principle." Naremore continues, "Mrs. Ramsay...has drawn closer to an essential self which can only be defines negatively, as a vast dark realm..." (134). The feminist critics I allude to in this paper read this femininity as a cultural construct, rather than as an essential fact. If men were more engaged in the process of mothering, Nancy Chodorow's views about the ways in which men and women see themselves and each other would be quite different. Hers is decidedly a social, rather than a biological argument.

Outwardly enacting the demands of patriarchy, Mrs. Ramsay represses her own needs for intimacy and comes to represent what Moi calls the "necessary frontier between man and chaos" in a patriarchy. Moi states,

> Because of their very marginality...[women] will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside. Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of all frontiers: they will neither be inside nor outside, neither known or unknown. (167)

By recognizing Mrs. Ramsay in terms of her "positionality," Lily begins to perceive some borders on the chaos within which Mrs. Ramsay lives. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily must work toward resolving the silence that Mrs. Ramsay leaves behind her; she accomplishes this by creating, in visual terms, a "language" that will embody the silence between them. Not to transform this silence would be to

recreate the same sense of chaos, indeed terror, that Mrs. Ramsay carried inside her. Ironically, Lily's acknowledgement and acceptance of the ways in which she is different from Mrs. Ramsay becomes Lily's means of connection to her. By the end of the novel, Lily's "love" for Mrs. Ramsay is no longer defined by her ability to "become one" with her. Rather, Lily's "love" must also include a healthy sense of separation from Mrs. Ramsay as she comes to establish her own autonomous identity as an artist. As Hirsch points out, the line down the center of Lily's painting signaling its completion is neither a line of separation nor a line of connection, but both at once (114). Lily does, Hirsch maintains, develop "a dual, perhaps duplicitous posture which, instead of resolving the differences between two opposing forces, embraces contradiction as the only stance which allows the woman artist to produce" (110).

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Just as Lily comes to reveal in her painting the duplicitous nature of her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf, in her style of writing, "exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning" as Moi puts it. In this way, Moi continues, "Woolf seems to practice...a 'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse" (9). In terms of content, Woolf exposes both Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's intense feelings of separation from

others without losing sight of their respective desires to merge with other people and objects in the physical world. Similarly, as Joan Lidoff points out in her article "Virginia Woolf's Feminine Sentence: The Mother-Daughter World of To The Lighthouse," this sense of fusion is also revealed in Woolf's style of writing. Lidoff explains, "a feminine sense of fusion, of lack of separation, boundary or division...permeates everything in the novel: imagery, structure, style, plot, tone and their interpenetrations" (43). Connecting these observations to some of the psychological underpinnings of the mother-daughter relationship we have been discussing, Lidoff continues,

> Woolf's prose communicates viscerally through all the rhythms, sounds, colors and pictures of language to use language to get around itself and back to the preverbal state of wordless communication. The flow of her prose in and out of different "realities" with no demarcation all replicates...the fused feelings of oneness of mother-infant symbiosis. (48)

While Lidoff suggests that Woolf creates a feminine sense of fusion and oneness in her style of writing, it is important to point to the "duplicity" of Lidoff's stance. While Lidoff acknowledges Woolf's strong sense of fusion in the way she uses language, she also recognizes the ways in which Woolf tempers, indeed, undercuts this fusion by revealing its opposite, an extreme sense of separation, through her use of language. In addition to expressing this

feeling of "oneness," Lidoff explains that Woolf's language in "Time Passes" recreates "not presence, but absence, not self, but self-annihilation":

> In the crucial "Time Passes" section, the black hole that is the center, and the center of absence, of the novel's tripartite structure, the language of the mother-infant physical connection and of the mirroring of gazes that is the primal source of self-definition is used with brilliant paradox to recreate not presence, but absence, not self, but self-annihilation. (46)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the ruin of the summer house is reflected in the ruin of language that Woolf suggests through the disintegration of metaphors that no longer reflect us: "The flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless and so terrible." (203). Indeed, Woolf creates an enormous gap between signifier and signified in this section of the novel. Struggling against these limits of representation, Lily, at least to some extent, actually succeeds in representing the unrepresentable, Mrs. Ramsay and her "aesthetics of silence." Simultaneously, in the larger narrative, however, Woolf exposes the "duplicitous nature of discourse" through this very strong tension between the joyous sense of fusion of signifier and signified and the terrifying threat of their separation that is suggested in the second section of the novel.

A strong sense of distance and separation between Lily

and Mrs. Ramsay is also created by Woolf's method of characterization. For instance, while this novel very clearly delineates Lily's longing for closeness to Mrs. Ramsay, there are no scenes in which these women interact with one another alone in present time. Woolf does not directly depict the scene in which she shows Lily leaning her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee. These scenes occur inside of Lily's memory or imagination (which, for Woolf, are often the same thing), even while Mrs. Ramsay is living. But while this lack of direct intimacy between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay suggests physical separation, this distance can, as Lidoff suggests, be read in another, equally viable way. That these scenes exist within the fluid medium of Lily's thought suggests a psychological intimacy that is as powerful for Lily (and for us as readers) as it is understated. Lidoff explains that

> Women writers' characterization is often crafted from a conception of fluid boundaries, especially the characters of mothers and daughters, and are frequently drawn as they exist within the minds and feelings of each other; they are imaged by reflections, without the distinctions between them always being clear--to them, to us, to the narrator. (44)

Elucidating the effect of such characterization on the reader, Dorrit Cohn explains in Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction that "The most real, the 'roundest' characters of fiction are

those we know most intimately, precisely in ways we could never know people in real life" (5).

Given what Chodorow has told us about the sense of boundarilessness among mothers and daughters, one can say that Woolf also employs a very feminine technique through her use of this narrator who floats with no recognition of boundaries from the thoughts of one character to those of another. According to Cohn's definitions, the method of narration Woolf most frequently employs in To the Lighthouse is "narrated monologue:" "the technique for rendering a character's thought in his [or her] own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration" (100). This question of idiom in a novel in which so many of the characters come from the same social background becomes especially relevant when we are speaking of the occasional appearance of a member of an different social class, such as Mrs. McNab. To come upon the rambling thoughts of any character, much less Mrs. McNab, in "Time Passes" is quite disarming since, as pointed out in chapter two, the absence of human objects and voices is emphasized in this section of the novel. True to Cohn's observation that the language of characters portrayed through narrated monologue "teems with questions, exclamations, repetitions, overstatements, colloquialisms" (102), Mrs. McNab thinks, in an idiom very much her own within the context of this novel,

> But people should come themselves; they should have sent somebody down to see. For there were clothes in the cupboards; they had left clothes in

> all the bedrooms. What was she to do with them? They had the moth in them--Mrs. Ramsay's things. Poor Lady! She would never want them again. She was dead, they said; years ago in London. (204)

Mrs. McNab's idiom--her use of exclamations and colloquialisms such as "they had the moth in them"--makes her presence even more shocking to the reader who has become accustomed to inhabiting the consciousnesses of characters such as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, whose attention to internal experience is so very acute. Mrs. McNab further draws us into the brute deterioration of the physical world through her observation of Mrs. Ramsay's clothing.

With the exception of her friend, Mrs. Best, Mrs. McNab is the only character to inhabit the summer house during the Ramsay's absence. For this reason, she must bear the weight of humanizing this scene for the reader. By adapting the strong speech patterns of Mrs. McNab, the narrator highlights Mrs. McNab's presence amidst the alarming absence that Woolf creates within the ruins of the summer house. At this point in the novel, we need to be able to remember the characters who have died. Mrs. McNab's memory of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew and Prue becomes an extremely important contrast to the narrator's bracketed announcements of their deaths:

> "Good-evening, Mrs. McNab," she [Mrs. Ramsay] would say. She had a pleasant way with her. The girls all liked her. But, dear, many things had changed since then (she shut the drawer); many

> families had lost their dearest. So she was dead; and Mr. Andrew killed; and Miss Prue dead too, they said, with her first baby; but every one had lost some one these years. (205)

So, through her use of narrated monologue, Woolf creates a sense of connection to Mrs. McNab, as well as a disarming sense of separation from her. Through this stylistic technique, then, Woolf draws the reader into a dynamic that replicates the duplicitous nature of Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay mother-daughter relationship.

Cohn points out that this form of narration "enables a narrator to weave in and out of several characters' minds" (118). As pointed out in chapter two, this narrator is capable of moving out of the mind of one character and into the mind of another in mid-sentence even, as she does when Mr. Tansley notices that Mrs. Ramsay is no longer paying attention to him. Precisely at this moment, the narrator is suddenly looking with all of the vividness of Mrs. Ramsay perceptions at a one-armed man posting a sign for a circus. Woolf moves with such seamless clarity through the minds of her characters that Cohn calls her "the master-weaver of...multi-figural novels" (118). Nowhere is Woolf's agility at this technique more apparent than in the dinner party scene in this novel.

In fact, Woolf demonstrates the limits of human consciousness by juxtaposing these spectacular narrative feats with the ordinary capabilities of her characters. Early in this scene, the narrator enters Lily's

consciousness to show her watching Mrs. Ramsay disappear into her own thoughts. Lily's observation is tinged with her desire to follow Mrs. Ramsay into her interior world, an ideal that can only be achieved by the narrator:

> Lily Briscoe watched her drifting into that strange no-man's land where to follow people is impossible and yet their going inflicts such a chill on those who watch them that they always try at least to follow them with their eyes as one follows a fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon. (127)

On one level, Lily's desire to merge with Mrs. Ramsay, in this case, to inhabit her very thoughts, is easily accepted within the world of this novel in which the narrator does this with such effortless shifting. Lily's desire to merge, however, cannot be separated from the "chill" she feels because she knows such desires cannot be met. This contrast between the capabilities of the narrator and a character demonstrates Woolf's sense of the limits of human consciousness. Further, this contrast demonstrates that the artist can, through art, achieve that which real life cannot be made to offer. This revelation becomes important for Lily as an artist later in the novel.

Insofar as Mrs. Ramsay "unveils" the thoughts and feelings of other characters in her "artistic" moment at the dinner party, she, too, mirrors the narrator of the novel, even though she does so only interactively, and not through representation. Early on in this scene, Mrs. Ramsay

perceives with some dread that "the whole effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (126). In one of the most lyrical passages of the novel, she creates (at least in her own mind) a moment replete with this sense of "merging and flowing and creating":

> It could not last, she knew, but at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripple and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling. So she saw them; she heard them; but whatever they said had also this quality, as if what they said was like the movement of a trout when, at the same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left; and the whole is held together; for whereas in active life she would be netting and separating one thing from another; she would be saying she liked the Waverley novels or had not read them; she would be urging herself forward; now she said nothing. For the moment, she hung suspended. (160-61)

Since the narrator is merged with Mrs. Ramsay at this moment, Mrs. Ramsay's moment is both privately and verbally represented. Nevertheless, one must describe it as preverbal in the world of this novel. Emphasizing the

fluidity of the preverbal in the content of this passage, Woolf depicts Mrs. Ramsay "thinking" that the conversation at the table has become like "the movement of trout." This passage embodies, both in its lyric content and non-narrative form, Woolf's contention that writing is "nothing more than putting words on the back of rhythms" (Marcus, 48). As is true of Mrs. Ramsay's perception of this moment, it is largely the rhythm of these words, as opposed to their "meanings" through which "the whole [of this experience] is held together."

Woolf not only fuses form and content in this passage, but in doing so, she contributes to our sense of an emerging third consciousness that is larger than that of the narrator and any given character combined. It is this consciousness that "hangs suspended" between the verbal and preverbal, and for one brief moment, Mrs. Ramsay is part of that consciousness. Explaining the ways in which narrated monologue contributes to what she calls the "figural consciousness," Cohn writes,

> By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation. (103)

Mrs. Ramsay's moment is as brief as it is profound, however, and, in no way can this moment "endure" (158), as Mrs. Ramsay's thinks it will. Further, while her "art" is

simultaneous with experience, as we discussed in chapter two, it does not signify her deepest feelings about her life--her feeling of being entrapped by domesticity, for example. To say that Woolf's writing can embody human consciousness is not to say that it can contain it. Rather, as Moi suggests, "the free play of signifiers" in Woolf's writing, or, for that matter, Mrs. Ramsay's musings, "will never yield a final, unified meaning that in turn might ground and explain all others" (9). In its insistence upon connection and separation as states of being that cannot exist independently of one another, Mrs. Ramsay's and Lily's mother-daughter relationship is highly duplicitous, and as Lidoff explains, this duplicity is mirrored in Woolf's style of writing as well. In fact, it is this duplicity that is at the heart of the contradiction between Mrs. Ramsay's experience and her art. The following chapters will discuss Lily's growth as an artist through her awareness of the subjectivity of "reading."

IV

Reading and Remembering

Reading Mrs. Ramsay and one's relationship to her becomes the central act of reading for the characters in this novel. Just as Lily attempts to read Mrs. Ramsay and James as they sit in the beach house window, Mr. Ramsay returns to this scene more than once in the novel as well. Both characters are trying to adjust their own relationships to Mrs. Ramsay, but unlike Mr. Ramsay, Lily is attempting to decipher what is unique about her, "the spirit in her, the essential thing, by which, had you found a crumpled glove in the corner of a sofa, you would have known it, from its twisted finger, hers indisputably" (76).

When Mr. Ramsay looks at his wife and child, he does not wish to see the thing that is theirs "indisputably." Rather than reading them as individuals, he sees them in a far more generalized scene. In a very interesting passage in which the relationship between women and the material world is clearly delineated, the narrator tells us that James and Mrs. Ramsay are as comforting to Mr. Ramsay as the things to which the printed page refers: "a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages," all of which lead Mr. Ramsay back to himself, to "the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind," his journey to the letter R. Reinforcing Mr. Ramsay's view of his wife and son as objects, Woolf writes,

> He stopped to light his pipe, looked once at his wife and son in the window, and as one raises

> one's eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind. (52-53)

Woolf implies in this narrated passage that Mr. Ramsay's association of his wife and child with the absent referents to which the printed page refers is quite unconscious. In addition, the narrator tells us that in Mr. Ramsay's eyes, Mrs. Ramsay and James are only <u>like</u> these referents. In effect, then, they are <u>twice</u> removed from themselves. Mr. Ramsay does not close the gap between signifier and signified, or for that matter, between himself and his family in his cursory "reading" of them. In fact, it is the gap between signifier and signified that so "satisfies" and "fortifies" him. Mrs. Ramsay and James become necessary figures in his "desolate expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region" to the letter R (54). They are, as Margaret Homans points out, the absent referents upon which this journey is based.

Mr. Ramsay's relationship to his wife at this point in the novel is similar to the one between the artist and his model that John Berger describes in his book <u>Ways of Seeing</u>.

Berger points out some inevitable contradictions inherent in European humanism, that champion of the individual, and in doing so provides a context in which Mr. Ramsay's reading of his wife can be read. Looking at paintings that depict the female nude, Berger states the paradox between the individuality of the male painter and that of the female model: "On the one hand the individualism of the artist, the thinker, the patron, the owner: on the other hand, the person who is the object of their activities--the woman--treated as a thing or an abstraction" (62). Berger uses the dichotomy between what it is to be naked and what it is to be nude to explore the ways in which these representations of women deny them their individuality: "To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude...Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display" (54). Berger goes on to explain that "In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him" (54). Mr. Ramsay's way of seeing his wife and child becomes analogous to the protagonist that Berger describes. In his highly abstract reading of them, neither James nor Mrs. Ramsay has an identity outside of Mr. Ramsay's needs. He does not "distinguish...either his son or his wife." Rather, he sees them as a single "sight" that "fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his

effort to...understand ...the problem which...engaged...his splendid mind." To see his wife nurture his son is in fact very nurturing to Mr. Ramsay. Not only does Mrs. Ramsay fulfill her role as mother, but the image of Mrs. Ramsay with her son validates Mr. Ramsay's view of her as object. She becomes, in his eyes, the archetypal mother.

Mr. Bankes also idealizes Mrs. Ramsay, but this time in terms of her beauty. Transforming Mrs. Ramsay into a Greek goddess, Mr. Bankes imagines Mrs. Ramsay's face as he speaks to her over the telephone:

> He saw her at the end of the line very clearly Greek,
>
> straight, blue-eyed. How incongruous it seemed to be telephoning to a woman like that. The Graces assembling seemed to have joined hands in meadows of asphodel to compose that face. (47)

Looking at Mrs. Ramsay only in terms of her beauty or ability to nurture, both Mr. Bankes and Mr. Ramsay tend toward more figural readings of her, readings that are in fact based more on their own desires than on Mrs Ramsay herself.

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Lily must see through these idealistic images of Mrs. Ramsay if she is to do justice to Mrs. Ramsay in her painting. At this point in the novel, Lily is unsure how she sees Mrs. Ramsay, but she is quite sure that she sees her differently than the ways in which Mr. Bankes reads her as she sits in

the window with James. In a passage that emphasizes the power of Mr. Bankes' "glance," (or his idealizing "male gaze" as it has come to be called in recent criticism), and yet also acknowledges Lily's attempt to see her differently, Woolf writes,

> Looking along the level of Mr. Bankes' glance at her, she thought that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped; they could only seek shelter under the shade which Mr. Bankes extended over them both. Looking along his beam she added to it her different ray, thinking that she was unquestionably the loveliest of people (bowed over her book); the best perhaps; but also different from the perfect shape which one saw there. But why different, and how different? she asked herself. (75-76)

While she is capable of reading Mrs. Ramsay in terms of her culture's valuation of beauty, Lily wants to see her "different[ly] from the perfect shape which one saw there." Since Mrs. Ramsay complies so thoroughly with the demands that her culture placed upon her as wife and mother, Lily must acknowledge these versions of Mrs. Ramsay in her painting. Beyond that, however, Lily also wants to investigate the way she "clapped a deer-stalker's hat on her head," for instance, "or ran across the grass, or scolded Kennedy, the gardener" (264). Lily is interested in these unconventional ways of seeing Mrs. Ramsay, as well.

Mrs. Ramsay is not the only woman in this novel to be

caught within this idealizing male gaze. Woolf clearing pinpoints this gaze as one of the main sources of the idealization of women when she describes Minta's "golden haze of desirability," as Homans describes it (277). Interestingly, in describing the ways in which Minta wears her "golden haze," Woolf gives us Minta's point of view as the object of this male gaze. Whether or not she is even wearing the "golden haze" appears to depend upon the one who gazes, upon Mr. Ramsay, not upon Minta:

> Sometimes she had it; sometimes not. She never knew why it came or why it went, or if she had it until she came into the room and then she knew instantly by the way some man looked at her. Yes, tonight she had it, tremendously; she knew that by the way Mr. Ramsay told her not to be a fool. (148)

Mr. Ramsay's insults in particular confirm for Minta that "tonight she had it."

Detailing Minta's subtle self-denigration and the imbalance of power at work here, Homans writes,

> To be called a fool by a man like Mr. Ramsay is to have achieved the only power--temporary and illusory at best, deriving from self-denigration--that, in Woolf's analysis, a woman can expect to enjoy within the conventions of heterosexual relations. For Mr. Ramsay, sexual attraction requires an imbalance of power, and Minta intuitively knows that her foolishness--feigned or

> genuine--helps to confer on her the "golden haze of desirability. (277).

The "power" that Minta and Mrs. Ramsay derive from the "conventions of heterosexual relations" is a self-perpetuating cycle of defeat. Both Minta and Mrs. Ramsay are in competition for "the prize" that Berger describes: "Those who are not judged beautiful are <u>not beautiful</u>. Those who are, are given the prize. The prize is to be owned by a judge--that is to say to be available to him" (52).

Mrs. Ramsay feels hurt when Mr. Carmichael refuses to give her "the prize," that is when he does not respond to her in terms of her beauty:

> She bore it with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered; and after all, veil it as she might, and shrink from the monotony of bearing that it imposed on her, her beauty was apparent. She had been admired. She had been loved. She had entered rooms where mourners sat. Tears had flown in her presence....It injured her that he should shrink. It hurt her. (64-65)

As an artist, Mr. Carmichael intuitively senses the self-consciousness, indeed the dishonesty, of the image that Mrs. Ramsay projects of herself. Pointing to the necessity of this dishonesty for women if they are to survive socially, Berger writes that a woman

> must survey everything she is and everything she

> does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (46)

While Mr. Ramsay idealizes Mrs. Ramsay as the archetypal mother, he also idealizes her in terms of her beauty. Interestingly, at the end of the first section of the novel, we see the result of this idealization from Mrs. Ramsay's perspective: "But she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever" (185). Further explaining the ways in which women come to see themselves as objects in much the same ways that men see them, Berger writes,

> To be born a woman has been to be born...into the keeping of men....A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a